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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org.* All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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The Platypus Review

Issue #122 | December 2019

1 **Thirty years of 1989**
The end of history?
Robert Bird, Patrick Quinn, John Abbott, John Bachtell, Earl Silbar

2 **On the use and abuse of Nietzsche for the Left**
Ethan Linehan

WWW:
1917–2017: The death of the Left
David Faes

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122

Thirty years of 1989

The end of history?

Robert Bird, Patrick Quinn, John Abbott, John Bachtell, Earl Silbar

On April 5th, 2019 at the University of Chicago, the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a conversation, moderated by Pam Nogales, on the legacy of 1989 at its 11th annual international convention. What follows is an edited transcript of the discussion.

Robert Bird: I don't know what more I have to say about the fall of communism than I said on the 20th anniversary, so I dug out my presentation from then. It was, in retrospect, merely the hollow shell of a once fearsome system, but we still felt pangs of trepidation as we passed by train from Finland into the USSR in the middle of June 1989. We had, after all, just watched the events at Tiananmen Square, which seemed, to us, to put paid to any premature dreams of an end to dictatorship in communist countries. Most of us had begun studying Russian amidst the spirit of hopeful liberalization that accompanied Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power, but there were few illusions about the limits of what was possible in a world defined by a stark, brutal opposition between us and them, east and west, communism and capitalism. It all seemed summed up in General Jaruzelski's cynically tinted glasses.

In my teenage rebellion, I once bought and wore a red hammer-and-sickle t-shirt, but only as a provocation, much like Virginio Ferrari's hammer-and-sickle statue here on the campus of the University of Chicago. I had read Marx with interest, but I had also studied some economics. I was very confused at the time.

What we discovered when we studied the eastern bloc was an entire parallel world, as if out of a science fiction novel. It had its own myths, many centered on World War II. What startled us most when we arrived at the Palace of Youth, was the contradiction between the myths and our immediate experiences. It was not only the queues that snaked for up to a hundred yards in front of the entrances to shops. The first Soviets we met were shady young men in a parking lot around our Palace of Youth dormitory who offered us marijuana, much like shady young men the world over; or perhaps they were KGB provocateurs seeking to get some Western kids into trouble?

Already in 1989 one could see that, like the local currencies, the Eastern values had long lost their value. On several occasions I encountered impromptu public gatherings, crowds formed around political debates or musical performances, which still seemed fearful and fragile; my friends were as likely to view it all as KGB provocation as they were to dismiss it out of hand as meaningless chatter. The fundamental opposition was between people who crowded — in shop queues, official meetings, unofficial demonstrations, or mobs — and those who remained in solitary and private spaces with a close circle of friends, bound by absolute loyalty to each other.

Life, or at least anything worthy of the name, took place indoors. I was lucky enough to have a number of friends through previous student travelers, who would take me in from the grey streets and showed me a life filled with color. It was from within these warm and claustrophobic domestic spaces that I viewed the events of 1989.

Throughout this period information was quite hard to come by. The Soviet newspapers reported some of the events in Eastern Europe but only in brief blurbs that lacked context and were therefore highly enigmatic. On 24 October 1989, we read in *Izvestiia* of public protests in East Germany following the election of Egon Krentz as chairman of the State Council and of the National Defense Council. Without actually explaining how East Germans had been fleeding to the West through Hungary, the article noted that the government was willing to allow citizens of the DDR to return home. This was on page 7 of the newspaper, which otherwise was dominated by speeches from the USSR parliament.

I distinctly remember reading an article in *Pravda* on 14 December informing Soviet readers that presidential elections were impending in Czechoslovakia. The first candidate was the leader of the Communist Party. A second was a prominent communist from the Prague Spring who was running as an independent. A third was Alexander Dubček. Almost as an afterthought the article mentions the playwright Vaclav Havel, running for the Civil Forum, which the article proceeds to portray as a strangely reactionary force opposing popular elections. I knew from the BBC that Havel was the clear favorite; the weak attempt at obfuscation, on page 6 of the newspaper, was quite puzzling. The populist rhetoric of Soviet ideology ended up tying the leadership's hands and preventing them from opposing outright what were clearly democratic choices being asserted throughout eastern Europe; their attention became focused on averting the same outcomes in the frigid USSR.

None of the future that we know was evident as I left the Soviet Union in May 1990, heading west on the train. I stopped for a few days in Berlin and caught the final days of the border between West and East Berlin, the last remnants of the Wall. I visited the shrine to those who had died crossing the Wall; I was struck by the most recent grave, dated February 1989. Alexanderplatz struck me with its Moscow proportions. Today, the entire socialist period seems to have disappeared from public view, no less from public minds. There is, inevitably, a sadness about this loss.

The exuberant carnival of revolutions may have upturned the established hierarchies, but they have not, to the disappointment of many, abolished hierarchy. In many cases the old elites quickly adapted to the new rules and re-invented themselves as populist demagogues. People miss many things in the lost civilization known as developed socialism; one of the things that has been lost most irrevocably is that warm, colorful domestic space of trust and freedom, the closest one can get, perhaps, to communism. But was this too an illusion? Most palpably, like the World Wars for previous generations, the fall of communism significantly by the events of 1989. I happened to be on the east side of Berlin in 1989, right after the wall came down. I recall all of these East Berliners going through the checkpoint, which they could never go through before, and coming back with boomboxes on their shoulders — goods that they'd never been able to buy. And I said, "God, is this what capitalism is all about, that you can buy a boombox?"

But I'm more concerned with what happened in the U.S. in the years prior to 1989 and subsequently as a member of the Left. By Left, I mean people who challenged the notion of capitalism as the prevailing economic mode globally and who opt for another type of economic, social and political society. I don't mean the Democratic Party opposed to Trump or anything like that. Thirty years after 1989, the Left in the U.S. is weaker than it ever has been. The Left grew during the latter quarter of the 19th century through events such as the Great Strike Wave of 1877, the Haymarket events here in Chicago in 1886, the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905, to the American elections of 1912 and 1920, when the Socialist Party candidate, Eugene Debs, received over a million votes.

The Left was fundamentally altered in 1917 by the Russian Revolution. The Communist Party split off from the Socialist Party. The 1920s were not a decent decade for the Left in the U.S. By the end of the decade, the Communist Party had only 10,000 members, most of whom were members of what were called Language Federations. The Left expanded during the Depression until the end of World War II and McCarthyism, which was a severe blow to the Left.

In the mid-1960s, the United States got involved in the war in Vietnam. The movement opposed to it led to the resuscitation of the Left in the United States. The end of the Vietnam war in 1971 had a tremendous impact upon the Left. The Left began to decline, and it's been in decline, not since 1989, but 1971. There have been instances where the Left grew a bit: the movement of solidarity with the people of Central America, particularly the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the revolution in El Salvador, and the brief-lived opposition to the First Gulf War. But then, again, the Left continued its decline.

The Maoist political tendency was probably the largest to come out of the movement against the war in Vietnam. The Progressive Labor Party was one component. A couple of groups came out of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), including Bob Avakian and the Revolutionary Communist Party, and what we used to call the Klonskyites. In the 1970s, the Maoist current was the first current to dissolve as people went on with their lives — got married, got jobs. Many of the former Maoists went into the Democratic Party, still keeping that kind of progressive outlook on life, but no longer considering themselves revolutionary socialists — thinking revolutionary socialism was a dead-end street.

Looking back, the template for the American Left has been the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution of October 1917. The problem is that while the writings of Lenin and the Bolsheviks certainly corresponded to the objective needs of that time and place, they certainly did not correspond to the objective needs of that time in the U.S. Most Left organizations were patterned upon the Bolsheviks and, as such, were unable to grow into large parties that could have an effect upon society. The Left had to re-examine — not so much as a result of 1989 — in reality what it means to be a leftist and what kind of organizational form being a leftist should take. That is the challenge facing the Left today. The Left is weaker than it's ever been. Unfortunately, last week, we saw

"Thirty years of 1989" continues on page 3

Patrick Quinn: I've been a socialist for almost 60 years. I was won to socialism by a student at the University of Chicago during the 1950s. He was a member of a socialist organization called the Young People's Socialist League. That's where Bernie Sanders was won to socialism.

I find this discussion of the year 1989 to be problematic, because in my own lifetime I was a socialist for 30 years before 1989 and I've been a socialist for 30 years after 1989. Things were changed significantly by the events of 1989. I happened to be on the east side of Berlin in 1989, right after the wall came down. I recall all of these East Berliners going through

"Thirty years of 1989", cont. from page 1

one of the most dynamic and viable Left organizations simply collapse and dissolve — I'm speaking of the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

John Abbott: I well remember that startling moment from 1989 when the news broke across the airwaves that Francis Fukuyama had declared the end of history. On the face of it, the assertion seemed quite absurd. Of course, Fukuyama intended something rather deeper, quasi-Hegelian. According to Fukuyama, the apparent triumph of liberal democracy across the globe meant that History, with a capital H, had finally arrived through the aimless treks of human affairs onto the end phase of historical eventuation.

On the face of it, history did not close up shop in 1989. Instead, we've been sent on a wild ride to destinations yet unknown, as the deep structures of the Cold War gave away to polycentric improvisation. A cluster of events and trends from that time helped, in ways that became clear with the passage of time, to establish the coordinates of this new phase of history in which we now live. The first was Tiananmen Square, which warrants further discussion in the context of this panel. One year before Tiananmen Square, James Hansen provided testimony before the Senate committee on the environment, testifying to the reality of global warming, an environmental challenge that initially gained some accord and consensus within U.S. ruling circles. It was not yet the highly partisan, polarizing proposition that it would become. Also in 1989, talk within European circles greatly accelerated over the project of creating a Euro, a new currency, a process or procedure anticipating the polycentric world to come, which led to the Maastricht Treaties of 1992, the creation of the Eurozone. That project has had profound ramifications for the European social welfare state.

There is no question that collapse of the Soviet bloc represented a great blow on behalf of human freedom. There can be no regret in observing the passage of dictatorships grounded in lies and profound spiritual corruption. But we live in a roughly zero-sum world and even if some bad guys bit the dust in 1989, other bad guys were able to maneuver this situation and gain new advantage. The appearance of the triumph of western capitalism, of liberal democracy, crystallized the ascendancy of neoliberalism in the west. Neoliberalism was nothing new to western politics, but in the aftermath of 1989, we saw a more ferocious insistence that free markets are the foundation and prerequisite of all human freedom, that the road to freedom is the capitalist road. Fukuyama's complacent assertion of 1989 as the end of history was already starkly controverted by the events of Tiananmen Square; the argument had been made that market liberalization in China would inevitably lead to a flourishing democracy and greater human freedom. The Leninist party has proven itself an apt instrument of capitalist development.

Neoliberalism did not suddenly appear after 1989, but it was weaponized into an aggressive political movement. Since 1989, we've seen the Contract with America, the Bush years, the rise of the Tea Party, the Koch brothers and company, and now Trump. Each of these represented a kind of shock treatment, shaking up the sleepy existing status quo, shifting the coordinates of American political life sharply to the Right. The Democratic Party has become the party of normalist restoration — that's the best that it seems to be able to hope for.

However, much we might hold neoliberalism in contempt, we have to acknowledge that side is winning strategically; they're reshaping within the frontiers of American life and across Europe and the former Eastern bloc. The notion of shock treatment was already well-travelled in respect to western policy to the Soviet Union. The imposition of coerced neoliberal policies has created a human catastrophe that has very much given rise to the movements that we associate with Putin and Orbán. The Euro project was inconceivable without a kind of neoliberal consensus underpinning it. Through the Euro we have seen a sharp transformation of European politics. The Social Democrats have bought into this notion and thus rendered themselves politically irrelevant, creating a political vacuum within European politics that has been conducive to the rise of the new Right. The social security state of European governance has been turned into an enforcer of capitalist discipline and austerity. This speaks again to the prevalence and hegemony of neoliberal politics.

The events of 1989 essentially obliterated the structures of the Cold War, which had provided some restraint on globalization. The rise of globalization has had profound political consequences. It eroded and undermined the national market political space within which social welfare reform could be pursued — within which collective bargaining had any meaning or traction. This has led to a growing politics of incoherence. I remember listening to Ramsey Clark speak in 1986. He announced that the old age of anxiety had now given way to the age of incoherence. We all intuited a lot of sense in that, but none of us at that time could have imagined the imbroglio that is, for example, today's Brexit situation. The side effects of the ascendency of neoliberal policies and rapid globalization have been to render still more incoherent and purposeless national political spaces. It's not surprising that much of the political fire these days is on the Right within the mantra "restore sovereignty," conceived in national terms and pursued through anti-democratic means. Those who are leading the charge for restoration of national sovereignty — Trump and the Brexiteers — are doing so through avowedly anti-democratic measures. This suggests a world moving in interesting directions. I'm trying to indicate some of the challenges that we face, of which we must be aware, to identify ominous trends, not to capitulate before them or to suggest there will not be counter-movements and resistance.

John Bachtell: Most of you were probably not born in 1989 — this turning point in history. The collapse of socialism in the USSR was an enormous tragedy, first for the Soviet people who have paid an incalculable price. The nascent criminal capitalist class, including many former Communists, in alliance with U.S. imperialism, created itself by looting the accumulated socialist wealth. Russia is a rival capitalist power seeking to expand its global sphere of influence, challenging the dominant global status of U.S imperialism.

In spite of all the mistakes and crimes, the USSR made singular historic achievements for humankind. Soviet socialism developed under the worst circumstances imaginable. Its development was further shaped by hostile capitalist encirclement and civil war. The threat of fascism in Germany forced the Soviet Union into accelerated development. Under Stalin, this forced march was combined with fear of enemies, foreign and internal, real and increasingly invented. The culture of uniformity prevailed. These circumstances stunted democracy, the economy and society, created the grounds for authoritarianism, and enshrined in the constitution the Communist Party and the cult of personality around Stalin.

By the time of the counter-revolution and collapse of the USSR, few defended the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, even though an overwhelming majority of people supported socialism. The demise of socialism in the USSR ended that era of socialism and the model of a centralized economy, total state ownership, and levelling of wages. This model and a lack of grassroots democracy were crucial factors in its downfall. Efforts to build socialism in China, Vietnam, and Cuba all rejected this model in favor of mixed economies and integration into the global economy.

Those countries face similar obstacles including underdevelopment, undermining from the west and isolation. They have their own approach to democracy, rooted in their own histories and philosophies. They all come up short in political pluralism, given that these societies are multi-class, and tend towards censorship rather than rigorous public debate. These evolving democracies are currently undergoing reforms in civil society, legal, judicial, regulatory and electoral structures. More significant changes are yet to come with the influence of transformative social movements, like the environmental movement in China.

A few lessons from the Soviet experience strike me. There are no models for the path to achieving working class political power or achieving socialist development. Socialist revolutions in different countries take place in different circumstances. Economic and political democracy and sustainability must be at the core of any socialist project to maintain support and engagement of the people. Democracy must ensure collective and individual rights. Humans, including revolutionaries, make mistakes, but they can be corrected, if revolutionary movements promote the capacity for sober self-reflection and avoid dogma. A socialist revolution is a long historic process stretching over an epoch and doesn't occur due to an insurrection. Socialism requires peace to develop. Economic isolation is inhospitable to building socialism.

Humanity is at a crossroads. We face unprecedented existential threats to climate and ecology, a growing nuclear war danger, wealth extremes and disruption from the oncoming technological revolution. Democracy is under assault in many countries. Humanity will be forced to reorganize society to address these existential threats.

U.S. imperialism is a descending superpower in today's world. Globalization is increasingly shaped by the rise of China, emerging economies, and alternative global institutions and blocs. The multi-racial American working-class and people will forge our own path to socialism rooted in the struggles of political and social realities, including the struggle for democracy. It is being shaped by the fight to expand economic and political democracy; to overcome social, racial, and gender inequity; to achieve a better, more secure, humane life and creative work; to pursue a sustainable path of development; and to demilitarize the economy and society.

I believe socialism will be achieved peacefully and democratically in the U.S. through the electoral arena and battles in multiple other arenas. Friedrich Engels suggested as much in the late 1880s with the advent of the universal franchise. He said, "The day of storming the barricades is over." This is validated by the growing presence of democratic and socialist movements in the U.S. electoral arena and success in electing grassroots activists, including women, people of color, trade unionists and LGBTQ people, to public office. Mass engagement will reform existing democratic institutions and compel the capitalist class to accept a path chosen by the majority and block any attempt to maintain power through violence.

The growing alliance for advanced democratic reforms and ultimately a socialist orientation is being formed now in the fight against the extreme Right to defend democracy. No advanced democratic reforms will be possible without the defeat of Trump and the extreme Right in 2020 and the election of center-left governing coalition at every level. The Green New Deal, an overarching vision that meets the challenges imposed by the climate crisis and wealth inequality, is so exciting. While it is not a program for socialism, it is a radical economic structural and social reform that, if won, will shift the political balance and open a new stage in the fight for green, peaceful and democratic socialism.

Earl Silbar: I want to thank Platypus for the invitation, especially whoever chose this question. At first, I thought, "I don't know that much about Germany or eastern Europe. The more I thought about it, I thought that this could lead anywhere — for example, to why the African National Congress (ANC) broke, betrayed the program on which they fought for many years — because it was an epic changing time. I want to look at it from the inside, as it were, and see what kind of lessons exist from that time and what came from it, rather than impose my predetermined path of history — not that I am giving up my ideas, necessarily.

In Germany, as in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and the rest of eastern Europe, there was no repeat of what happened in '53, when the working class of eastern Germany rose up in the streets, initially because the piece work rates were being decreased and their standard of living was threatened. It was put down, not by the existing government and the forces available to it, but by Soviet tanks, just as it took Soviet tanks to crush uprisings in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. But in 1989 there were no Soviet tanks. That tells us a lot.

What explains that? The elites who held political power and made the economic decisions in the Soviet Union had already given up on that course. I remember reading magazine articles translated from the Soviet Union in which the politically active elite in the Soviet Union were talking about free markets. The free market ideology had penetrated. It goes back as far as Khrushchev, who advised the third-world revolutions, as they used to be known, "Don't follow our example, make your own path." The failures of central planning generated hordes of jokes among the Soviet people.

Workers were reduced to following and responding to plans that were imposed. They would get paid depending on whether they met objectives as the end of the month or the end of the year. Tremendous resources were put into production that had nothing to do with the actual needs or the actual circumstances on the ground. Their leadership and elite were looking for ways out of that system. Gorbachev, who was trying to guide that development, made it very clear that Soviet troops would not go in to obstruct. These regimes fell practically without the use of any violence or force, because they did not have an organic basis in those societies. These regimes came as a result of the victory of the Red Army in World War II. They weren't really developed until it became clear that the U.S. had no intention of continuing its aid to the USSR after the war.

In Poland they were negotiating with Solidarnosc to become a legal opposition and they had elections, and the German demonstrations were under way. In Tiananmen square, the Chinese ruling elite, headed in a clear capitalist direction, crushed an uprising of tens of thousands of students and workers. This is not part of popular history, but the students had gone out into the working-class communities across Beijing, and tens of thousands of workers came on motorcycles and trucks, because the democracy they wanted was communes. They were looking to the Paris Commune. The workers in China were rising up because their basic security was being threatened by the turn towards capitalism. They had guaranteed food, health care, housing, education — all through state enterprises. That was being taken away. Hence the call of the students to return to the Paris Commune joined with the rising anger of the workers. The difference between the regimes was that China had crushed it in blood.

The Cold War is over. The United States is the supreme hegemon. The neocons said, "We have a unique opportunity to expand the impact of American capitalism and to tear down all government restrictions on the freedom of our capital to penetrate the world." We saw this with the first Gulf War and the rise of globalization, which continued the destruction of all restrictions from the 70s on, and of which Thatcher and Reagan were big proponents, leading attacks on the working class. Nation states were still representatives for their capital. We saw the inability of global capital to deal with climate change.

In place of globalization, nationalism is rising — national controls, tariffs, taxes and privatization. China is superseding the period of U.S. hegemony. China now has 50% of U.S. investments in Africa, up from 2% 20 years ago. China's expansion with the Belt and Road Initiative, and their model with internet control and the great firewall, proposes an alternative to liberal democracy. The challenge for your generation is to establish a global picture of what the world has to be because capitalism is clearly unable to restrict emissions. Capitalism has generated tremendous hardship for the working class, in countries where they once had relatively better conditions. The popularity of the word "socialism" with the generation aged 25-40 is due to the experience of the last ten years.

Pamela Nogales: We in Platypus think that we learn through highlighting some of the arguments and disagreements on the Left, to clarify the way in which the 20th century has passed into history. Some panelists saw 1989 as a tragedy; others as an advancement of human freedom. Robert talked about the passing of dreams, and whether they haunt us today. John Abbott brought up the relationship between the consolidation of neoliberalism and the fall of the USSR. Finally, many speakers brought up democracy — did democracy triumph in 1989?

RB: It is a great privilege to be in the company of such distinguished experts in thinking radically about the world we live in, especially over the tumultuous post-war period — the lifetime of my parents — and now, shockingly, I have become one of the old timers looking back on this past century.

I am struck by this idea of a politics of incoherence that 1989 has bequeathed to us. It is especially stark in eastern Europe. For me, the Russian situation is the most familiar and most troubling. We see a retreat from ideology, but looking back at 1989, we see some of the benefit of ideology, the need for ideas, for a coherent picture of what we want for our world. In eastern Europe, the withdrawal of this future horizon left people with an atavistic focus on a mythic past of struggle and trauma. We saw it explored in the Yugoslav wars, which weren't mentioned here. Yet, that kind of atavistic nationalism has become the norm not only in eastern Europe, but the United States. The withdrawal of ideology has become attractive even to those who thought they were beyond ideology. I am not a coherent thinker in that sense. I don't have a picture of what I want for the world. Although I agree that something like a Green New Deal has a very powerful attraction to the imagination, we know how it will go down in mainstream America, with their lawns and SUVs — it's not going to fly. But it might energize certain populations somewhere in the country. That would be a good thing: to present some kind of coherence in response to this very troubling incoherence.

PQ: We are better advised not to look back to 1989. We are all aware that it happened. We might have differences as to why it happened. The focal point has to be 2019 and beyond, not analyzing what happened in 1989.

The ideology of the ruling class is free markets. We hear the mantra of neoliberalism. That is the ideology that's prevailed. We have to have a counter-ideology to that. The Green New Deal is one component. We need political independence. In the U.S. we have two capitalist parties, the Republicans and the Democrats. If there is going to be any change whatsoever, there has to be political independence from the two parties that presently exist, just as Eugene Debs and the people in the past in 1912 and 1920 developed the Socialist Party. Some countries have independent parties: the Labour party in England and the New Democratic Party in Canada. That is the challenge in the coming period. In 2020, people will say "Anybody but Trump; so we have to support the Democrats otherwise we will have Trump for four more years." But in terms of the political reality, there has to be independence from these two parties and the development of another political expression, to deal with climate change or the tremendous disparity between the 1% and the 99% of people.

JA: In 1989 we saw a collapse of illusions, which was a good thing. There were tragedies in that story. A whole generation had to confront the idea that entire lives had been a lie and had no value within the new scheme of things.

The idea of the end of ideology is a challenging one. I am usually at pains to not be ideological. But there is a problem here. I have always been struck by the raw nihilism of America's Right, a nihilism that extends to Vladimir Putin and that kleptocracy: the exercise of power for its own end. On the one hand, the anti-government nihilism, and on the other, the ferocious will to power. That is an inherently unstable and destabilizing proposition. The assault upon community and civil society requires an answer. We have to identify those truths that we hold to be self-evident and be principled in them. We have to recapture a language that is capable of speaking of the common good and a public interest.

We come from this vaguely ecumenical socialist background. Capitalism introduces an incredibly social character to labor and production: thousands of people thrown together in factories. Mature capitalism has atomized labor to a shocking degree in the gig economy and social media. There is something in this moment that we have to identify. Alongside the loss of ideals, we have lost a sense of community. We must recreate a real sense of community based upon cosmopolitan, tolerant liberal values, as opposed to this atavistic shit passing for an ersatz community ethic.

JB: I, too, am looking at 2019. As a Marxist, you try to interpret developments today through that lens and how you can change society. The Left and ideas of socialism are more prevalent today than ever in my lifetime. Not long ago, you couldn't utter that word, until Bernie's campaign, when there was a mass public discussion about socialism. It is profoundly democratic to say that there is a different future, an alternative to capitalism, and for tens of millions of people to think about that, to discuss it and to let that sink in. Already in 2010, half of Democratic party activists felt that socialism was better than capitalism. The highest percentage was among African-Americans and young people, of course. People were reacting to the great financial crisis in 2008. This is a huge component of the upsurge that we are a part of — the #MeToo movement and the fight against Trump. In every movement, the Left and socialists are active and giving great leadership. People have different conceptions of what socialism means, which is fine. As Reverend Barber says, this is a moral movement. That is really important because in the seeds of today's movement is the society of tomorrow.

ES: Let me start by disagreeing in the most agreeable way. The idea that the U.S. ruling class will give up power based on peaceful elections seems absurd given the violence that this ruling class has engaged in since the beginning of the colonies. This is one of the most violent societies and ruling classes in history. The idea that they will give up their power because they lose an election seems absurd. Politically, you'd be insane to follow that idea, or suicidal.

We need a response to the conditions that have evolved since the fall of the Soviet Union. Climate is a global issue; therefore, it calls for a global response. Capitalism has not been able to form a global response. Hundreds of billions of dollars are being invested in green energy, but the idea of curtailing the right of capital to invest is non-existent. The Paris accords are a joke — a public relations fraud. The Green New Deal, likewise, for all of its job proposals, says zero about stopping the use of coal, oil and gas. It is a jobs program just like FDR's, which did not solve the problems of the 30s — that was World War II. It is all within the realm of capitalist competition and market strategies.

A return to revolutionary communism is called for. The previous speaker was wrong when he said you couldn't talk about socialism before Bernie. I was part of a wing of SDS with a thousand people in a caucus based on the idea that students should align with the working class and that the working class was the only source of potential socialism and communism for the U.S. and the world. So, it can be done, but it won't be done by singing lullabies. We must recover the democratic power of the working class, which has to be actively involved. A party, a state, nationalized property and a plan is not socialism; unless the working class is actively involved, you cannot have a successful transformation of bourgeois relations.

Q&A

The fall of the Berlin wall marked the 71st anniversary of the end of the Wilhelmine Reich and the 55th anniversary of Kristallnacht. We had a panel discussion on the German revolution last night. Ebert, Noske and Scheideman were socialists, as were Luxemburg and Liebknecht. There were socialists murdering other socialists in the name of democracy. Maybe we should not be talking in the language of an ecumenical socialist tradition, because that seems to be an illusion, if you look at the history of the 20th century. The question is what kind of socialism do we want? How do you see a connection to the revolutionary moment not just of 1917 in Russia, but the German revolution, in terms of the later history?

PQ: Of course, there are assholes who are socialists. Anyone familiar with the history of socialism knows that socialists or people who called themselves socialists were the ones who had Rosa Luxemburg killed. We are not being ecumenical socialists in the way that you suggest. We can hail individuals who have been socialists, such as Eugene Debs. Just because there are

"Thirty years of 1989" continues on page 4

"Thirty years of 1989", cont. from page 3

some bad apples, the whole barrel isn't rotten. *Neoliberalism keeps coming up. What are we talking about? We have the Reagan revolution, the right of free markets and austerity, against the New Deal, as a kind of equitable democratic form. But that elides the left-wing critique of the welfare state, which you could say was a predecessor of neoliberalism. Foucault, for example, related the authoritarianism of the psychological system with the welfare state. It seems to go back and forth: there's a critique of the welfare state that leads to neoliberalism and then there is a reappraisal of the welfare state as the best way forward. Must the defense of the welfare state pay heed to the critique of the welfare state that the New Left offered?*

PQ: Who is for the welfare state?

JA: I am.

PQ: Well, I'm not. That shouldn't be the goal that we aspire to. The welfare state is a good fuzzy capitalism. We want a completely new type of society, a socialist society, not a welfare state.

Others were talking about the Green New Deal. I see your critique, but what about the Green New Deal?

PQ: Today, people who are revolutionary socialists can support reforms in the present context, but know that reforms are, in themselves, not the ultimate goal.

JA: I raised my hand in support of the welfare state because I think that reforms would elevate our way of life and pull many people out of this dog-eat-dog existence and enable them to see a little further. If you call yourself a democratic socialist, you can't insist upon a system that outlaws any form of capitalist activity. I think Scandinavia represents a much better way of life, but chauvinist legislation in Denmark recently was directed against Muslim immigrants. People say that Scandinavian socialism sucks. We have to disaggregate those policy issues. Nothing in the welfare state guarantees that people will be decent to one another. If we take seriously the idea of democracy, our task is not simply to coerce or suppress those emanations of the human spirit, but to enlighten, persuade and yes, where possible and necessary, to suppress. But we have to do that within the evolving democratic consensus. We have to work with the human resources that are actually presented. We cannot simply say that socialism, by instituting a certain set of socio-economic reforms, is going to solve questions of chauvinism. The experience of the USSR shows that is not the case. There will always be contradiction and dispute. That is where my version of ecumenical socialism comes from. I do not dispute Foucault's point, but that in itself does not invalidate the value of social reform. That is not tantamount to the whole project of human liberation.

ES: From my previous interactions with Platypus, I know that there is a different language and mindset that I just run into parts of, so I don't want to be presumptuous, but the welfare state is failing and transforming. Sweden has not been a fully social-democratic society for years. The labor party there has instituted cuts to education and many benefits. I think our future is much bleaker and starker. The competition of capital around the world is increasing. The challenge is to have a democratic communist party that projects the contradictions in all areas of life. It is about taking from within each situation the actual elements, both class and otherwise, and bringing them to the fore and developing class-conscious people who can see that. That is the only solid basis that capitalism gives us, not just for resistance, but transformation.

I agree about the atomization of mature capitalism. All the factories I worked in are gone. But even at Amazon, which has these huge automated factories, where everyone is watched and has technology, there was a walkout in Minneapolis a week ago. A lot of those workers were Somali refugees. People from around the world bring not just language and interesting foods, but experience in struggle, which is much rawer and more brutal than what we have here. Let's take a class-conscious stand on immigration and say, "Our brothers and sisters have great gifts to bring to us and we have the same enemy, and we have the potential for the same future."

JB: The welfare state represented gains won by the working class. Gains under capitalism are temporary and you have to fight like hell to maintain them. A lot of people who consider themselves democratic socialists look to Scandinavian societies as the model. I think socialism is more systemic — it's working class power. Nevertheless, those policies are really important for any socialist society. How do we defend these things and deepen them, to get to the root of the fight in society as a whole?

In 2019, people want to know from leftists, how did we get here and what do we have to say about the history of the present? I am curious about the proposition that in the 20th century we just had some bad apples and that is how we should think about the past of socialist politics. In asking what 1989 means for the Left, we are asking how does the history of the Left bear upon the present? We are not antiquarians; we are trying to make sense of the past in order to give ourselves a history from which to move on from. There is this resistance to thinking about 1989 historically. It seems to be a closing chapter for the 20th century, so we are trying to figure out with this how it informs your idea of socialist values and your practice.

RB: Looking at the history of radical thought, particularly the thinkers that I work with most, there is a recurring idea that socialism requires grassroots organization at a small scale — the Paris Commune, the 1905 and 1917 soviets. Guy Debord, about whom I was thinking as a critic of the welfare state or the controlling state from the Left, returns to this idea of the soviets. 1989 should alert us to the utopian nature of that particular model. For the first time, possibly, we had a liberation struggle that rejected the grassroots socialist organization and moved to integration with the neoliberal world order. 1989 is being called this carnival of nations, appealing to an even pre-modern image of emancipatory behavior, but it requires a new image of emancipatory self-organization, especially in the digital age. I have no suggestions for what that might be. It grates on me a bit to hear everyone go back to the soviets of 1905 and these very fleeting moments — Berlin 1918. 1989 put an end to that and requires a different revolutionary imaginary.

ES: I agree. 1989 was terrible and wonderful. Tens of millions of people around the world, for better or worse, looked to the Soviet bloc as an alternative to American-led imperialism. At the same time, 1989 stripped away the mask, because they wouldn't fight to defend their system. In the Soviet Union, the working class was forcibly excluded from power for generations. Hence it collapsed. That poses a necessity to come up with a different way of understanding transformation, revolution, party. And yet the working class is still there fighting.

Patrick Quinn addressed 1989 as the anti-climactic fizzling out of a leftist history that had already been in the long arduous process of dying. He said that the Left's momentary peaks since the 1920s were during the Vietnam War and the American crushing of the Sandinistas, but those are very reactive forms of resistance politics. It is no longer clear where the optimism of future ideals would have been expressed in such a context. Today, a leftist position is being put in reactive and pessimistic ways. Millennial socialism, e.g. Ocasio-Cortez, can only rally young people to socialism by telling them, "Climate change will destroy the planet in 12 years and that is why you are a socialist." There is no optimism or inspiring vision. It is not clear to me what is leftist about such politics.

PQ: You must have a positive alternative and vision. The Left in the United States had its largest impact during the 1930s, but there were no socialist parties getting anywhere near the number of votes that Eugene Debs got in 1912 and 1920. Since the 20th century began, the two major parties in the U.S. have not left much space for any kind of alternative vision of society. Bernie Sanders was able to do that: you could talk about and discuss what socialism meant, as opposed to the prevailing capitalist society.

John Abbott outlined the last optimistic vision to emerge in the 20th century, neoliberalism, something that was self-consciously predicated on progress and the expansion of freedom. It might not have turned out that way, but it struck me that that was the last novel form of expressing freedom in the 20th century.

JA: It presents a road of enchainment through empowerment. The most terrifying totalitarian ideology is right-wing libertarianism, as put forth by the Koch brothers. It destroys and eradicates the social and creates a kind of dictatorship of the economy as achieved through a vastly recast state in which privatization determines everything. Accountability is no longer social or public, but private. Nothing has sold the American public more avidly upon the identification of their own interests with that of capitalism than the elimination of pension plans and the creation of privatized pension accounts.

I object to the treatment of the green imperative as reactive or narrow. It is the most important ideological challenge of our day. The building of borders throughout parts of the world is as much due to the droughts as political instability or warfare. A lot of people already live a green lifestyle, but it is depoliticized. Joining that green lifestyle to a more aggressive political program would be a really powerful movement. The Green New Deal is a part of that, but not all of it.

JB: The Green New Deal is an exciting and inspiring vision. It addresses our real needs. It is a source of optimism when millions of people struggle and move in a similar direction. The conversion to a sustainable energy source is a revolutionary thing for our society that gets at how we organize and produce in society.

ES: Optimism comes from confronting climate change. If every country in the world had a Green New Deal, we are still going to hell. I am not against it, but we need to look at its limitations. We need a new world order producing what we need based on our understanding of our resources, not based on private wealth. That vision of the future opens the door to changing all kinds of social relations. Now that we no longer have capitalists in power, we don't have power serving capitalist social relations. And that is the only cause for hope there is.

Given the collapse of the ISO, does the legacy of Trotskyism have anything to offer the future? Or did Trotskyism's prospects collapse in 1989 with its object of critique?

PQ: The collapse of the ISO doesn't negate the contribution of Trotskyism. Its demise has nothing to do with Leon Trotsky. 1989 really confirms Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union. Trotskyists predicted that if the form of control established when Stalin took over Lenin were to continue, that society would collapse, which is what happened.

ES: I'm not a Trotskyist, but Trotsky made some great contributions, one of which was counterpoising the United Front of the working class to the Popular Front of the Comintern. The Popular Front had to be acceptable to the capitalists. The United Front is about the working class and different political tendencies having a common goal but being able to argue out their differences and move forward.

When did ideology end and this age of incoherence begin? How did we get from the era of high ideologies — Marxism, socialism — in the 19th century, to the incoherence that the panelists described as marking 1989?

It's been "the best of times, the worst of times" from the panel: the ISO is dead, but the DSA has grown. But, at least ostensibly, the ISO was a Marxist organization and the DSA is not. 1989 seems to defeat Marxism. Boomers, who reconsidered Marxism in '68, stopped being Marxists in '89; and Gen Xers decided not to become Marxists, going for social justice values or postmodernism. Why wasn't Marxism re-investigated after 1989 and why isn't it being reinvestigated now?

JB: I don't know when ideology ended. In the Brexit debate, the Labour Party, which someone previously defended as still nominally ideological, is completely incapable of presenting any sort of position on the EU. It is all tactical discussions. Never once have I heard Jeremy Corbyn, for all of his leftist credentials, utter any idea. The politics that I grew up in was low in ideas, but in comparison to today it had ideas — people stood for things.

I live in a world where people constantly talk about Marx. No one mentioned Piketty, about whom I know only his name. There is Hardt and Negri, and Alain Badiou. Is that effective? Is it good in philosophy? Trotsky represents for me an approach to Marxist theory. Maybe Marxist theory is the future of ideology. Maybe Marxist theory buried ideology. I don't know. But there is a lot of discussion of Marx and Trotsky in academic disciplines. Marxist analysis has shown itself to be extremely flexible via Trotsky, Gramsci and Frederic Jameson. It needs to generate some kind of new energy and not rely on the old.

PQ: I wouldn't blame the evisceration of the Labour Party on Jeremy Corbyn, but Tony Blair, who took the guts out of the Labour Party, which have never been returned. It is not so much a question of Gen X not opting for Marxism or any ideology, or of the Boomer generation giving up Marx. There hasn't been an entire generation of Marxists after that period because there were hardly any Marxists around to draw people around them. The Left was in the process of decline. It became more and more difficult to attract people to Marxism.

JA: My sense is that Marxism lost greatly in vitality and relevance well before 1989. Marxist thought once had vitality and relevance in the historiography of the French Revolution. As the 200-year celebration of the French revolution arrived on the scene, there were few, if any, defenders of the decrepit and widely discredited Marxist orthodoxy in respect to that epochal struggle. In the 1970s, you see various attempts to resuscitate Marxism by creating ever more elaborate forms of structural Marxism that seek to integrate base and superstructure, culture and economic change. The end result: few people care anymore.

In the Soviet Union, 1989 wasn't simply a collapse or a grassroots uprising; it reflected a chronic and protracted crisis within elite culture within the Soviet state. Few people, in the end, believed any of this stuff. Marxism had proven itself, at least as it was understood and practiced, to be an inadequate tool of analysis. Andropov in 1992 admitted in public about the economy, "We know next to nothing" — a remarkable concession. Intellectual collapse and waning vitality cause 1989; it is not the consequence of 1989. That collapse made possible the freeing of what was still useful in the Marxist tradition from all the encumbrances of this frankly corrupted tradition and might enable us to go back to the drawing board.

JB: I remember during 2008 everyone in the media was talking about the rediscovery of Marx. I think Marxism is very relevant for us today: not dogmatic Marxism, but Marxism enriched by what is new. If it just deals with questions of what took place year ago, but doesn't try to enquire about today's reality, it is a dead and dogmatic. To be alive, it has to be creative and develop.

I will wade into the ISO issue. The #MeToo movement and the internal cover-up over rape contributed to the collapse of that organization. We have all changed as a result of that movement. There is also the DSA, and involvement in electoral politics and broad electoral alliances. If you want to be a political factor in today's world, you have to work within the two-party system, while building political independence. Bernie Sanders could not have got 13 million votes if he did not run in the Democratic primary. Organizations that don't have an inside-outside strategy or make alliances with all kinds of political forces within the Democratic party will be isolated.

ES: I agree with most of that, but I strongly disagree with everything else. In Marx, socialism comes out of capitalism, just as after 2008, sales of *The Communist Manifesto* skyrocketed. Marxism has a bad name because of with the failure of the Soviet Union. The Chinese have some brilliant new animated features about Karl Marx as a young man. However, the whole point is to change it, right? It's a state religion in these countries — a museum piece. In the Soviet Union that's what Marxism is; it covers up for the exploitative nature of these societies. The Chinese Communist Party has imprisoned a number of students from the elite Chinese universities for the crime of aligning themselves with industrial workers who wanted to create their own union, because the unions run by the party and the state are company unions. There is living Marxism and museum Marxism. You have to be able to see beyond that, otherwise, let's just go out and get drunk. **| P**

Transcribed by Efraim Carlebach

"Nietzsche for the Left", cont. from page 2

shrink neither from its own discoveries, nor from conflict with the powers that be."[20] Nietzsche likewise hoped that the "herd without a shepherd" would philosophize with a hammer, would not be pleased with itself, but would re-evaluate itself and strive always for self-overcoming, to be more than the beasts they were before and the *mere* men they were at present:

> Mankind surely does not represent an evolution toward a better or stronger or higher level, as progress is now understood. This 'progress' is merely a modern idea, which is to say, a false idea. The European of today, in his essential worth, falls far below the European of the Renaissance; the process of evolution does not necessarily mean elevation, enhancement, strengthening.[21]

Herbert Marcuse once said, "If Marx is right, then Nietzsche is wrong."[22] But what if the corollary is true? Perhaps, until Marx is right, then Nietzsche is. The difference is between what Nietzsche called "the optimist of 1830" versus "the pessimist of 1850." While Marx remained insistent that the ongoing movement for freedom would advance to ever-greater heights, Nietzsche primed us for a lifetime of decadence culminating in the Last Man. That Nietzsche understood his dialectical style as a relic of his infantile intellectual innocence takes on more significance considering how dialectics characterized the thought of an entire society in its youthful spring (Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, et al), whereas the society characterized by the abandoned dialectic totters around in its senility and old age, demanding to be put down.

One could treat capitalism as just the final rotten stop on a long road of meaningless suffering and subsequently embrace the nihilism, but neither Marx nor Nietzsche would be satisfied. We are tasked by them with giving a meaning to our suffering — the same suffering we in fact created and recreate daily. The madman of Sils Maria surely suffers from a dearth of ready-to-hand categories of political economy and therefore leaves us irresolute *vis-à-vis* the finer points of the political struggle to overcome our out-of-control state of unfreedom. Nevertheless, Nietzsche remains relevant on this side of emancipation from capital because he brings to light important antinomies of bourgeois thought, certain necessary appearances of the crisis into which society has stumbled blindly. It is he who sits in Judgment's chair awaiting us to overcome our debased condition in service of life. The price we pay for leaving Nietzsche buried under the calumny from the contemporary "Left" is the foreclosure of the possibility of creating a critical Left up to the task of changing the world.[23] **| P**

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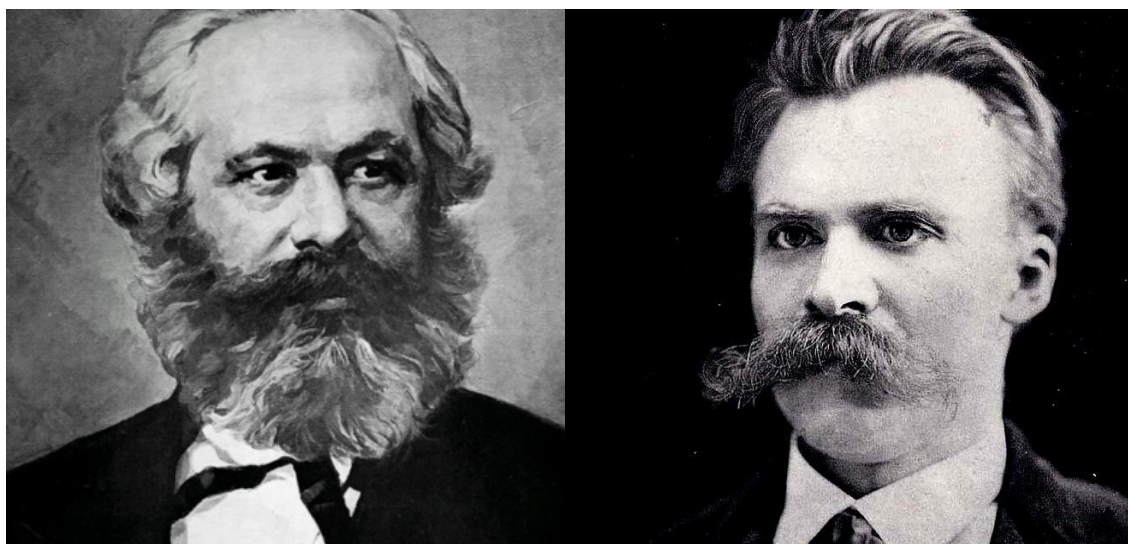
On the use and abuse of Nietzsche for the Left

Ethan Linehan



> Poor wretches have no idea how corpselike and ghostly their so-called "healthy-mindedness" looks.
> — Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)

> Man is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?... Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman, a rope over an abyss... What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under.
> — Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883)

LATELY QUITE INDISCRIMINATE WHEN APPLYING THE CENSOR'S PEN, the Left at present showcases no great respect for Friedrich Nietzsche. Few figures, excepting perhaps Adam Smith,[1] have received such scorn from the Left as has Nietzsche. The philosopher of ice and high mountains has all too assiduously been banished to the depths of rightwing reaction or derided as a brief flirtation only fit for male teenage angst. This ubiquitous rejection says very little about Nietzsche and very much about the historical impoverishment that has bedeviled the Left for generations. If the Left has no time for Nietzsche, it is to its own detriment. For in their haste to cast aside Nietzsche, the Left has shown their cards. Their incensed dismissal of him betrays the truth: Nietzsche's project and the contemporary Left really have *nothing* in common. Nietzsche does us no favors in this regard because he never claims Left affiliation. The Left historically was defined by its utopia, by its vision for the future, by its progressivism, and by its striving for radical change. The Left is about freedom, an opening of possibilities, and an overcoming of the limitations of what currently exists. Nietzsche, though certainly he champions an opening of possibilities, trenchantly and consistently put pressure on the very concept of progress and showed it to be shot through with antinomies, but therein lies his importance for the Left as we must take the time to see. Much like Adam Smith and Rousseau, Nietzsche's thought as a philosopher of freedom pervades a very rich and very much forgotten history on the Left that demands urgent recovery. The Left *per se* has long been attracted to Nietzsche owing to his devastating indictment of the status quo and his insistence that modernity itself is only a rung on the ladder to higher things. If my attempt to play archaeologist for three generations of serious, critical appraisal of Nietzsche does not prove illusory, then the Left today, by uncritically rejecting this history, evinces it is *de facto* not a Left worthy of the name.

From Marx to Nietzsche

One could sufficiently abridge the intellectual orientation of the 19th century thus: *attentive to history*. As Nietzsche scholar Peter Preuss put it, "the 19th century had discovered history and all subsequent inquiry and education bore the stamp of this discovery. This was not simply the discovery of a set of facts about the past but the discovery of the historicity of man."[2] The critical recognition of history as the site of an unfolding drama in which humankind must play an active role was the indelible mark of the Enlightenment; this tradition reached its philosophical zenith in Hegel. However, history took on a new specificity post-Industrial Revolution. Marx is the most significant name to have optimistically registered the new possibilities and problems of history, but Nietzsche quietly took the stage once the future of history became mired in melancholia. Nietzsche was born just four years before the whole Hegelian system was dashed on the rocks in the wake of European-wide revolutionary defeat. It is no coincidence that this is when Marx's insights first coalesced. Nietzsche lacked a dialectical understanding of capitalism (the breakthrough we attribute to Marx), but Nietzsche's thought always remained immanent to the contradictory nature of bourgeois society in crisis. One commonality that holds between Marx in dialogue with Nietzsche is their common commitment to dialectics; this is most evident in their shared usage of the German verb *aufheben* ("sublation" or "overcoming"). That is, Nietzsche's project is amenable to a Hegelian/Marxian framework, despite the mental resistance within Nietzsche on that framework (late in life when reflecting on his earliest work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche considered his insistence on dialectics a folly of youth).[3] Nietzsche is closer to the dialectical tradition than his 20th century Heideggerian reception would have you believe. Nietzsche indeed should be considered *the last Hegelian*. The unity of purpose between Marx and Nietzsche is that their common project is both a continuation of and a break from their Hegelian roots. Nietzsche is marked, as much as Marx, as symptom and spokesperson of a pathologically symptomatic and unhealthy age. As Chris Cutrone has written, Nietzsche describes the modern condition as "an illness, there is no doubt about that, but an illness like pregnancy is an illness." After nine painful months, pregnancy results in new life. Pregnancy is a kind of illness for the mother, but it is the locus of life for the baby. It is only because of the mother's sacrifice to endure the illness and not to seek to end the pregnancy that the baby can be born. Pregnancy is a problem of *potential*. Pregnancy is only an illness insofar as it has not run its course. Once the baby is born, the pregnancy is made worthwhile.[4]

In this same way, Cutrone continues, capitalism is a problem of potential. We suffer from the unrealized potential of capital. Capitalism is not an illness to be cured. It is not to be eliminated. Rather, like a pregnancy, capitalism is to be successfully gone through, to bring forth new life. Socialism haunts capitalism like a "specter," like the baby kicking in the womb. But attempts at birthing socialism have miscarried or been aborted before. Karl Marx called revolution the "midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one." Socialist revolution would make socialism possible, but it would not birth a ready-made socialism. An infant, especially one not yet born, is not mature enough to live. History is riddled with socialist revolutions that were delivered but were non-viable. Maybe socialism is merely a "fever dream" that chronically recurs but always passes with time. Socialists hitherto have been far too unhealthy to successfully give birth to a new society. They mistook capitalism as an illness to be cured, rather than what it actually was: a symptom of potential new life in the process of emerging. Nobody thus far has supported the pregnancy. This would mean seeing the symptoms through to their completion and not trying to stop or cut them short.[5]

Nietzsche dared to ask "Are there perhaps — a question for psychiatrists — neuroses of *health*?"[6] What symptoms in this society point *beyond* themselves? For both Marx and Nietzsche, following Hegel, modernity is not to be apotheosized as the "end of history"; rather, modernity demands to be made transitional. Nietzsche and Marx, unlike Hegel, stress *future* history rather than the past — for example, Nietzsche *did not* pine for a return to an idyllic Hellenic age. Nietzsche as acute psychologist has insights into the life of a subject living under conditions of bourgeois society in disintegration that remain relevant so long as we are tasked with overcoming our decadent condition.

Nietzsche after death

Following his descent into madness and untimely death, Nietzsche found fans and critics on the Left throughout the world. In an 1897 questionnaire for Leipzig workers' libraries, it was reported that Nietzsche's works had been borrowed far more often than those of Marx, Lassalle, and Bebel.[7] The highly volatile political consciousness of the late 19th and early 20th centuries put Nietzsche to ever more conflicting purposes. The multifarious uses to which Nietzsche was put now, in hindsight, represent the ongoing crisis within Marxism. Franz Mehring could unequivocally damn Nietzsche as the mouthpiece of capitalist reaction, charting an accommodationist and parliamentary course to pseudo-action rather than revolutionary action, while other members of the SPD could feel as though they and Nietzsche were kindred free spirits, "outsiders" full of dissent against the established order. It was during the Revisionist Dispute that efforts to synthesize Marx with Nietzsche intensified, especially when Left Nietzscheans strayed ever further rightward. One critic in the SPD argued that Nietzsche must be reckoned with; he must be internalized and at the same time overcome.[8] Naturally, this course charted many paths. Clara Zetkin, for instance, treated Nietzscheanism as merely an episodic fascination quite useful during a romantic stage in one's politico-intellectual development. Others, like Victor Adler in Austria, infused into social democracy Dionysian impulses designed to rouse an awareness of power in the nascent proletariat. J. Karmeluk's 1904 *Proletarian Sermon from the Mount: An Intermezzo from the Transvaluation of Values* made from Nietzschean themes a socialist gospel fit for bringing paradise on Earth. Pre-revolutionary Russian Marxism got the most mileage from Nietzsche in the early 20th century, too often by positive appropriations of Nietzschean statements as readymade values for a socialist utopia. Trotsky's famous critical eulogy for Nietzsche stands out as a bright spot in a sea of reactionary darkness in Russian philosophy. Lunacharski, Volski, Bogdanov, and Bazarov found support for their own revisions of Marxism in the professed Anti-Christ, through conservative transmutations of him into an individualist proletarian hero reminiscent of his usage by Mussolini or into a coercive immoralist in charge of the future commune dedicated to stifling all individualism. This movement famously and deservedly earned Lenin's scorn, thereby removing Nietzsche from Russian Marxism indefinitely following 1917.

Nietzsche's reception languished in existentialist hell for the next two decades, suffering under the weight of Heideggerian disgust with modernity. Existentialism is clearly marked by its place in the wake of worldwide revolutionary failure. Freedom becomes a nausea-inducing, ontologically-given burden to be regretted rather than a daunting but urgent social task. Freedom is posed as an individual matter, both theoretically and practically. The existentialists participate in an antinomy of individual voluntarism and deterministic economism (which they ascribe to Marxism) — an antinomy that Marxism itself had already overcome. Even the Marxist-friendlies like Sartre acknowledged the resignation in their retreat from Marxism as a political project. They tried to find in the apolitical Nietzsche a safe haven for mere contemplative thought, but this Schopenhauerian nausea with life and paralysis of action were already rebuked by 1872.

Nietzsche and the Frankfurt School

Circumstantially removed from the homeland of Marx and Nietzsche by a fascist movement claiming to be creating a race of Supermen, the expatriate members of the Frankfurt School pondered, however counterintuitively, "What would the Nietzschean corrective to a post-1917 world be?" Nietzsche proved to be both a provocation and an indispensable asset to a reconsideration and revitalization of Marxism *from within*. For the Frankfurt School, Nietzsche's work gained a renewed relevance as critical voice against the vulgarization of Marxism. Dating back to the split between Right and Left Hegelianism, there existed the tension that Marx identified between affirming history and struggling over history. Nietzsche indicated that the unbowed "cheerfulness" characteristic of the late 19th century actually displayed a self-dissolution and weakness:

> Could it be possible that, in spite of all "modern ideas" and the prejudices of a democratic taste, the triumph of *optimism*, the gradual prevalence of *rationality*, practical and theoretical *utilitarianism*... might all have been symptoms of a decline in strength, of impending old age, and of physiological weariness? These, and not pessimism? Was Epicurus an optimist — precisely because he was *afflicted*?[9]

Nietzsche is denigrated as a philosopher that holds too tightly to contradiction, but this is a most helpful contrast with the vulgar Marxism that paves over contradiction and flattens out a dialectical reality. During the Revisionist Dispute, Marxism succumbed to the Hegelian split through its belief and faith in steady progress, in its affirmation of history and its institutions being on its side always. Marxism, thoroughly revised in the old liberal progressive fashion that Nietzsche detested, required a Nietzschean corrective:

> Nietzsche, as early as 1873, heaped scorn upon the "Hegelian worship of the real as the rational," which he further castigated as a "deification of success." He accused Hegel of offering an "apotheosis of the commonplace [or 'everyday']" in order to ingratiate himself with the "cultural philistine, who... conceives himself alone to be real and treats his reality as the standard of reason in the world." According to Nietzsche, David Strauss is being a faithful Hegelian when he "grovels before the realities [or 'conditions'] of present-day Germany." In the following year Nietzsche went on to accuse Hegel of "a naked admiration for success" and an "idolatry of the factual."[10]

The culmination of Hegelian philosophy took place for Nietzsche when he recognized that his fellow Hegelians were decadent defenders of the status quo, that their philosophizing hardly comprehended their own time in thought, and that Nietzsche had to posit what was integral to his own unhealthy age in order to advance *beyond* it. Nietzsche is the antidote to the diseased bourgeois "Last Man" satisfied with himself — a critical perspective that Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno felt was most congenial to Marxism.

Marx consistently expounded the bourgeois realization that "all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature."[11] Nietzsche did not disagree: "All philosophers have the common failing of starting out from man as he is now and thinking they can reach their goal through an analysis of him. They involuntarily think of 'man' as an *aeterna veritas*, as something that remains constant in the midst of all flux, as a sure measure of things. Everything the philosopher has declared about man is, however, at bottom no more than a testimony as to the man of a very limited period of time. Lack of historical sense is the family failing of all philosophers."[12] As Preuss said, "History is the record of [our] self-production: it is the activity of a historical being recovering the past into the present which anticipates the future. With a total absence of this activity, man would fall short of humanity: history is necessary." But what if *historicism* takes over? What if history becomes about collecting facts that are "to be left as they were found" instead of being life-affirming and life-creating? Nietzsche argued this dangerous and deadly misstep had occurred and must be overcome. One must break with one's given past in order to live, in order to have a future. History is no passive, disinterested thing at all, but a task for life.

By contrast, taken in by an affirmative reading of *amor fati*, Gunther Anders felt comfortable saying in 1942 that "Nietzsche did not offer a positive transformation of the world, but instead an acceptance of the world as it is... Perhaps one can use Marx to interpret Nietzsche, but not vice versa. Nietzsche is not a revolutionary who wanted to transform the world; he has merely erected an image, he does nothing for his goal." Against this premature dismissal Adorno, following Benjamin, utilized Nietzsche's critical understanding of history for a Marxist critical theory of the "philosophy of history" in order to re-introduce the Marxist concept of *regression*. For Nietzsche the present is the starting point for a critique of and reappropriation of the past. Benjamin adds the twist that the past indeed judges the present, and that we have fallen below a higher threshold reached long ago. If history is meant to serve life, then what needs might *our* history be failing to meet? Is our history in constellation with an anterior epoch? Adorno said:

> As a precondition of the discussion we must acknowledge that Nietzsche's entire discussion occurs in the realm of ideology. We must thereby ascertain the real motives that lie hidden beneath the ideological motives. Nietzsche's critique of culture has, despite his categories, identified certain aspects of the social problematic that are not given per se in the critique of political economy. He has developed certain critical intentions farther than they have been elaborated in the post-Marxist tradition. We need to decipher Nietzsche in order to see what kind of fundamental experiences lie behind his approach. I believe that one will then arrive at things which are not so separate from the interest of most people... Here precisely lies the motive that binds us to Nietzsche. Nietzsche [...specifies...] those things that in reality are ideology. One can pinpoint in Nietzsche those elements where his theory is true. He perceives that not only democracy, but also socialism has become an ideology. One must formulate socialism in such a way that it loses its ideological character. In certain critical respects, Nietzsche progressed further than Marx...[13]

Horkheimer, reinforcing Adorno, said "the expression that certain structures assume in Nietzsche is not merely a reflex but represents something essential." Nietzsche is often reduced to one particular structure, his attack on the Christian religion, but even this reduction shows his relevance and his situatedness as a symptom of capital. With Engels' specification, Nietzsche's immanent critique of Christianity should recall his timeliness in a society where the rule of capital is breaking up: "For a society in which commodity production prevails, Christianity, particularly Protestantism, is the fitting religion."[14] After proclaiming the death of God, Nietzsche asks, "Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" This recalls Marx's attempt to eliminate alienation to make us all into self-legislating agents capable of our own value creations. To transform the world through Hegelian philosophy would be to make humans in reality the gods that Hegel made them in thought.

Nietzsche at the crossroads

The question is, do we still need Nietzsche to throw cold water on a naive faith in steady and non-contradictory progress? The history of the 20th century gives no indication otherwise. We are consistently told "the struggle goes on." Any thinker of use has been pushed out of reach. The New Left's long march through the institutions left a tornado's trail of scholastic destruction in every department in the Western world; no one teaches from the perspective that the best of the Left once critically held dear. The Left (Marxist and other currents in tandem) has invidiously prostituted Nietzsche to anyone reaching for him, voluntarily ceding ground to any trend from postmodernism to proto-fascism: The Left in their smugness is content to allow the claim recently made by Jacobin Magazine to stand: "[Nietzsche's work] in its essence... belongs to the right."[15] Every month it seems a new reader discovers in Nietzsche something "problematic" for what they assume must be the first time. Expect newfangled (the same old) defamation campaigns to be trotted out by the Left here in the year of Nietzsche's 175th birthday. Leftists will again try to locate "the thinker's own extreme-right views" in a "German nationalist anti-semitism" so patently ridiculous and long ago disproven, or perhaps they will go in for the "aristocratic elitist megalomaniac." The real Nietzsche died and remains dead, and the Left killed him. Any critical purchase he could have on our moment continues to bleed to death under our knives.

Most relevant is how the Left today consistently stumbles over Nietzsche's scathing remarks about socialism.[16] Nietzsche's critique of socialism requires the proper resonance with Marx's. They both spring from the same discontent with the bourgeois project of freedom. How does one paradoxically reconcile Nietzsche's disparaging comments about socialism with the Marxist conclusion that socialism, with its emancipatory intent, clearly addresses one of Nietzsche's main worries — a decadent society committed to unhealthy values? Nietzsche famously attributes a politics of *ressentiment* and a "pessimism of indignation" to the "socialist rabble" and the "apostles of revenge."[17] Of course the socialism that Nietzsche had in his sights would not and did not escape Marx's gaze either. Marx is mistakenly considered the founder of the socialist movement; rather, it was an ongoing movement stuck in the throes and birth pangs of self-discovery. Marx was in fact socialism's harshest and most necessary *critic*. Nietzsche is known as a critic of socialism, and so should Marx be. The most prominent socialist criticized by Nietzsche was Eugen Dühring; Marx and Engels published two major works criticizing Dühring. Marx wrote in an 1843 letter that "communism... is a dogmatic abstraction; in which connection, however, I am not thinking of some imaginary and possible communism, but actually existing communism... This communism is... still infected by its antithesis: private property."[18] It is not by accident nor from malice that Marx calls communism "brutish," "completely crude," "thoughtless," consumed by "greed" and "envy," and possessed by "the urge to reduce things to a common level" — a "leveling-down process."[19] All very Nietzschean! In many ways the secular socialists were more retrogressive then the Christians insofar as they hoped to preserve and make eternal social relations that Christians had long been hoping to undermine and make transitional. Marx too scorned the much heralded equality of socialism only to be achieved when we are all equally low in the gutter. The discontents of capitalism cannot avoid reproducing the pathology of this society. Marx's hope was that the movement for socialism could be honest about being a one-sided negation born from *ressentiment*, could be self-aware about its aims and methods in pursuit of *aufheben*; for that it was necessary Marx's critical perspective become internalized: "If we have no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time, there can still be no doubt about the task confronting us at present: *the ruthless criticism of the existing order*, ruthless in that it will

"Nietzsche for the Left" continues on page 4